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SUBJECT: INDEPENDENT ELECTORAL COMMISSION IN PLACE, BUT ELECTIONS
STILL FACE SIGNIFICANT HURDLES.

REF: A Bangui 181, B Bangui 250

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) for the Central African (CAR) elections of 2010 was sworn into existence on October 8, 2009 and its president, Pastor Joseph Binguimale, voted into position shortly thereafter. To date, the IEC has been largely quiet, and the general consensus is that the Commission and its president have neither sufficient political weight to be a true force in the elections, nor the technical expertise to function effectively. The government (CARG) has asked for formal help from the UN Development Program (UNDP), which has just finished an assessment mission. The UNDP will recommend to the UN Secretary General that the elections be held in the constitutionally mandated period. In a related development, on October 29, 2009 the National Assembly began debate on a formal extension of President's mandate. With only five months to go until the elections, Post believes that the elections will happen but that the condensed timeframe means that the results will be questionable. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The newly sworn in IEC is comprised of 30 members from ruling and opposition parties, civil society, public sector workers and the political military groups. The 31st member, the president, was selected from four candidates controversially proposed by the Prime Minister and the President of the National Assembly (Ref A). The Electoral Commission is in charge of organizing and supervising presidential and general elections; including the establishment of electoral list and polling stations, the training election workers, and the procurement of election materials. Troublingly, despite promises, the IEC does not yet have any office space and no funding. (They are working out of space provided by the UNDP.)

13. (SBU) The President of the Commission, Pastor Joseph Binguimale, is also the subject of some controversy. Elected by a plurality, with 19 of the 25 votes (five members had yet to reach Bangui), Binguimale is thought to have won the votes of all the Presidential Majority and Public Sector Workers with Civil Society and Political Military groups voting in large part for him as well (NOTE: Four of the five Civil Society members are thought to be pro-Bozize and the Political Military groups likely understand their interests lay in supporting Bozize as he is the counter party of all lucrative peace deals with them. END NOTE). Yet Binguimale is not a well know figure nationally. Leaving the CAR in his youth, Binguimale was originally a chauffeur for the CAR embassy in Paris and held other menial jobs before finally becoming a pastor. Since then, he has spent the much of his time in France. As such, many observers feel he does not have the political strength or power base to make the IEC a force in the electoral process. Furthermore, the members of the IEC are largely unknowns nationally and few have election experience. While there is one former Minister and Deputy Minister, the rest include a relative of Bozize's, mid level functionaries, priests and teachers - with five rebels finishing the list.

14. (SBU) The UNDP has been identified as the chief interlocutor with the CARG for the elections and through which all international funds will pass. Current capacity at the UNDP is very low. The office presently has five employees from its Democracy and Governance office working on elections as a part of their greater portfolio. Only one current UNDP employee worked for the organization during the elections of 2005 - he is now in the management section - and the office head admits that institutional memory is nonexistent. Officials within the UN organization and other partner institutions have complained about the lack of professional capacity and preparation in the elections unit. With the new arrival of the UNDP Country

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Director and Resident Representative their aptitude should improve, but this enhancement has come at a very late stage.

15. (SBU) A UNDP Mission from New York has just concluded a two week visit to Bangui and will formally recommend to the UN Secretary General that the elections happen in the scheduled timeframe. The Mission met with all of the major actors on the sociopolitical scene of the CAR and did a very solid job identifying the major challenges that the electoral process faces:

- Lack of political will by most of the major actors (with the notable expectation of President Bozize).

- No funding for the IEC and a complete lack of technical knowledge by its members.

- Rampant insecurity outside of Bangui.

- The stalled DDR process.

- A total lack of voter registration lists.

- 138,200 Central African refugees outside of the country and 162,300 internally displaced people.

- Logistical difficulties of getting voting materials into and around the country.

- Weak institutional capacity of the governmental bodies that will be key to the elections like the Ministry of the Interior and the Constitutional Court.

16. (SBU) The UNDP Mission also identified funding for the elections as a worry. They believe the elections will cost USD 16.5 million, of which currently USD 11 million has been found:

- Despite a constitutional mandate to hold elections every five

years, the CARG, did not appropriate money for elections until late September 2009 when they set aside CFA 1 billion (USD 2.26 million) in a budget addendum. The CARG promised the UNDP Mission that it would set aside another CFA 1 billion in the 2010 budget for the elections.

-- The European Community set aside 4 million Euros (USD 5.88 million) for the elections last year and as soon as the UNDP becomes officially engaged, they will release the money into a basket of funds.

-- So far, the USG has pledged about USD 1.7 million in USAID/DCHA and DRL funds for civic education, election monitoring, and civil society work, but none of this money will be used to fund the elections themselves.

-- The French Ambassador recently intimated that his government, which has remained conspicuously silent on election funding, would contribute a ``significant'' sum in the coming months. He did not elucidate further, and the French may also be waiting for the recommendation of the UNDP. The French DCM, however, earlier mentioned that France may contribute up to 500,000 Euros to the UNDP trust fund.

¶7. (SBU) In its concluding meeting with the international community, the UNDP Mission cited that the CARG's stated will to hold the elections gave the Mission sufficient confidence to recommend to the Secretary General that the elections be held on time and that the UNDP be the chief technical advisor to the

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process. They will send three technical advisors in the coming weeks to help with capacity building of the IEC and logistics planning for start of the electoral list compilation. They also gave a preliminary timetable:

- Dec 2009 - Start of the electoral list compilation
- Feb 2010 - Identification of voting locations
- Around April 25, 2010 - First round of the elections
- Around May 6, 2010 - Second round of the elections if needed.

¶8. (SBU) According to a credible source, President Bozize's son, Deputy Minister of Defense Francis Bozize recently told the Director General of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie that election preparations were well underway and the electoral lists were in good shape. Considering that it is the IEC's job to draw up the lists, his statement may lend credence to the rumors circulating Bangui that the government has been engaging village chiefs and mayors to clandestinely prepare electoral lists favorable to Bozize.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: With the UNDP advising the Secretary General that the international community should support the elections, great care will have to be taken to ensure that the quality of the elections remains the responsibility of the CARG. The very real possibility exists that the international community will be blamed for irregularities if it does not face the process with a unified voice calling for CARG accountability.

¶9. (SBU) Francis Bozize's statement, true or not, displays a justified confidence on the President's part that he is well positioned for the elections. With the opposition fractured and lacking a coherent message - and with the recent arrival of controversial former President Ange Felix Patasse (Ref B), which may further split the opposition - Bozize stands in prime position for another five-year term. The possibility of a mandate extension has some potential to postpone the elections, but it seems more likely that the President would use this as a last resort if an opposition figure was able to separate himself from the fray and have a reasonable chance at defeating the President.

¶10. (SBU) Fundamentally, the CAR is a top down political system

where the incumbent's advantage is institutionally significant. The President nominates Governors, Deputy Governors and Mayors in all towns of consequence, allowing him to shape the political climate. Therefore, it is most probable that Bozize will seek to push through elections that will meet minimum requirements using his built in advantages of incumbency and a weak opposition. It is worth noting that while the UNDP in Bangui may have no experience in running an election in the CAR, Bozize is well experienced, having won election in 2005. END COMMENT.
COOK